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## LOW LIFE ABOVE STAIRS.

Now, whom was it that he reminded me of? Why, of Spangles, of course. And as the tardy policeman had by this time arrived, and closed the proceedings, we did not stand upon the order of our going, but went at once.

I was returning from the theatre shortly before midnight, and, in one of the small streets leading out of Oxford Street, I perceived a goodly-sized crowd, from the middle of which came a man's voice high in oath, and two brawny arms brandished in defiance. I always stop and look on at a row, for the sake of studying the realities; so I pushed my way into the crowd, and as I got near the heart of it, heard something like this, delivered at the top of the speaker's voice:

'Come on, you beggar! Let me go, I tell you. I'll break every blessed bone in his cursed carkiss, before he's two minutes older. Come on, you ——' (N. and M. to take a hint from the Catechism.) 'I'll spile your pretty face for you. Do you think, because you're a 'eavy swell, you can insult our wives, and play what tricks you like? I'll teach you to insult mine, anyway. Come on'—N. and M.—'and see if I don't knock every hatom of wind'—

The rest of the passage was so corrupt, that it would be utterly unintelligible to, at anyrate, the *gentle* reader; therefore I will merely say that it was generally to the effect that the speaker proposed depriving some one of every particle of breath, and reducing this person's outer man to such a state of blood and bruises, that his nearest relations would be unable to tell the difference between him and an exploded Guy Fawkes; and that if he, the speaker, allowed himself more time than two minutes and a quarter to work this radical change, it was his ardent wish that all the elements of nature would unite to cause his own immediate and utter destruction.

By this time, I had got to the front row, and saw a big burly fellow, with his coat off, and his sleeves turned up, trying to pull himself away from his wife and a friend, in the direction of a

young man, evidently a gentleman, as his calmness, in contrast with the bluster of his antagonist, testified.

'I never insulted your wife,' he said, raising his voice no more than was necessary to make himself heard; 'she knows I did not. However, it's no good arguing with the fellow. Loose me, Charley.'

The costermonger—I am sure he was a costermonger—shook his wife off, broke from his friend, dashed past me like a whirlwind; I saw his brown arms cutting great curves in the air; then a white hand shot like a flash of lightning from his adversary's shoulder; and the defender of conjugal honour, when next beheld, was sitting in the gutter, with a look of the utmost astonishment upon his face. The crowd laughed, which increased the wrath, though it failed to refresh the courage, of the fallen costermonger. Warned by the force of the blow which had dropped him, and, perhaps, anxious besides to keep as near as possible to the fountain-head of inspiration, he did not attempt to rise from the gutter, but contented himself with shouting out at his antagonist a volley of vile and shameful words, for the selection of which his seat in the kennel must have been very handy. Nor were his denunciations directed entirely against his late adversary. His wife, who by some means was the cause of the quarrel; his friend, who had interfered; the lookers-on, who had laughed; and even his own eyes, body, and limbs came in for a share. Such a noise as this could not go on for very long without attracting a policeman, and it was just as this official made his appearance, and as the crowd, principals and witnesses, were hastily dispersing, that I smote upon my thigh, and cried: 'Spangles, of course.'

And who was Spangles? Not know Spangles! Not know the great tragedian, beloved by gods and men, but principally by the gods! Why, if a vote were taken as to what actor best deserves the title of the Roscius of the day, Spangles would have the people's voice to a man, for the people's voice is the voice of the gods. Still, if you ask me to say candidly what I myself think about him, I should whisper to you that, to my mind, Spangles,

as an actor, is *Vox et præterea nihil*; and I ought to be able to give an opinion, for on this very evening I had seen, or, more correctly, heard him in *Othello*. Not that it was with any wish either to hear or see Spangles that I had gone to the theatre this evening. No; Spangles was only a necessary evil that I was obliged to put up with. My real reason for going was, that I desired to see some low life above stairs; so I put on a very old hat, and a very old coat, which, however, seemed to me but thinly to disguise my naturally aristocratic exterior, and set off with the intention of going into the gallery. I wished to see what sort of people went there, how they behaved, and in what light they regarded the legitimate drama; for *Othello* was to be the play, and Spangles was to take the Moor.

I could not at first find the entrance to the sixpenny-gallery, the favourite abode of the gods; I found the shilling-gallery, but that was not nearly low enough for me; so I asked a policeman—with some embarrassment, I confess, and with a meaning smile that was intended to put the officer up to the fact, that it was no regular gallery-goer who asked the question, but a philosophically-inclined member of the most select circles—where the sixpenny-gallery was. The policeman, without exhibiting the least surprise at my question, or manifesting any wonder at my going to such a part of the house—my disguise was evidently more perfect than I supposed; but still, a policeman's eye ought to have penetrated it—stolidly replied: ‘The other side the 'ouse—in Blank Street.’

‘You'll never rise very high in *your* profession, my good fellow,’ I muttered, as I followed his directions, penetrated to Blank Street, and began, with a number of others, the ascent of a staircase, which seemed as if it aspired the clouds. Flight after flight I surmounted; corner after corner I turned, and at last reached the money-taker's box; but this, which I had thought would surely be the end of my journey, was only the half-way house. I was delayed here for a short time, until a woman with four babies had concluded an argument with the money-taker on the subject of half-price for children; and after this was arranged, my progress was necessarily slow, as I was obliged to follow in the wake of this body of infantry. This, however, gave me all the more time for observing my companions, and judging of their position in life by the remarks that fell from them; and when I overheard one man whisper to his neighbour: ‘I say, Bob, don't this remind you of the mill?’ I felt much satisfaction in the thought that I was actually touching a thief, and still more in the recollection that my watch and purse were both safe at home.

When we had ascended about half a mile, according to my calculation, the mother of the four asked me whether I would mind taking charge of one of the children till we reached the summit. I am of a fatally-yielding disposition; the infant looked tolerably clean, so I consented; and as I slowly mounted the stairs,

Boswell's question to Johnson: ‘What would you do, sir, if you were shut up in a tower with a baby?’ recurred forcibly to me. The child contented itself during the journey with staring fixedly at me, and biting its thumb in an insulting manner; but when we had almost reached the head of the staircase, excited, I suppose, by the elevation which it had gained, it set to work crowing—don't they call it crowing?—like the early village cock; to stop which performance as speedily as possible, I pushed past the mamma, surmounted the remaining bit of the Hill Difficulty, gained the House Beautiful, and stood at last in the gallery, a god confessed. Rendering up my charge to its mother, who was very grateful, I walked along the barrier at the back of the gallery-benches, in the hope of finding a seat unoccupied; but I had come rather late; the first piece, a farce, was over, and the people were waiting anxiously for the curtain to rise upon the tragedy. As I did not come to see the play, this did not much matter, so I leaned against the barrier, and stared about me.

The gallery itself was a dingy, gloomy, by no means fragrant loft. Looking down into the house was like looking from under a shade, such as weak-sighted persons wear to defend their eyes. The roof came down like a huge poke to a cap; and almost in a line between me and the stage hung the chandelier. Eating and drinking, occasionally kicking the boards, to intimate to the management that they were waiting, but far quieter than I had expected, the gods thronged the benches before me. I was surprised at the quiet that prevailed. There was scarcely any laughing; conversation was, as a rule, carried on in a low tone; I heard but one of those shrill whistles with which a playful divinity is wont to make the whole house ring; and the grave and decorous feeling which seemed to pervade the entire assembly, was well expressed in this short speech, made by one near me: ‘It [the tragedy] ain't begun yet. You're in lots of time. The first piece is just hover—only a hijiotic farce.’ The coming tragedy evidently cast its shadow before; the gods were seriously preparing their minds for the terrible drama.

Feeling rather like Ixion in heaven, I proceeded to observe the gods more minutely, and, by what I knew of their attributes, to distinguish one from another. There was no difficulty in finding Vulcan—he was omnipresent. The grimy god was to be seen everywhere, with his coat off and his sleeves turned up, as if he had been forging thunderbolts up to the last minute. It was not easy, however, without making invidious distinctions, to say who should be considered the original Vulcan; but I at last pitched upon a person who, besides being of superior foulness to his fellows, was entitled to the preference on the ground of his being seated near a very pretty girl—Venus, of course. Venus was the gem of the gallery, and, with her soft dovelike eyes and bright smile, would have passed for the goddess of love in very much better company than she was in at present. Close beside Venus, as

might have been expected, was Mars, an immensely tall Lifeguard, between whom and his fair neighbour there seemed to exist a certain sympathy, occasioned, perhaps, by the fact, that while she was dove-eyed, he was pigeon-breasted ; or it may have been only the attraction that a pretty face invariably has for a red coat, and a red coat for a pretty face. But where was Apollo ? Where was the god of day ? I was inclined to think at first that my own immediate neighbour was the deity in question, from the extraordinary interest he took in the music.

'What d' you think of that now ?' he murmured to a friend beside him. 'There's a twist for you. Don't he come round 'em ? My ! what a 'and for a fiddlestick he has got !' And so on. But as the music did not seem to me to merit especial commendation, and as my friend's facial parts did not at all come up to my ideas of Apollo, I changed my mind, and concluded that he was some inferior divinity, who took, after the custom of the Olympians, an special interest in some individual fiddler in the orchestra. As I was gazing carefully round, looking about vainly for an Apollo, a voice from the farther side of the gallery called out—the gods have a habit of occasionally shouting to each other—'Bill, where's Ginger?' To which was replied from my side of the house : 'He's gone down.' This threw some light upon the subject. Evidently, amongst the Immortals, the sun-god was known as 'Ginger,' on account of the warm and brilliant nature of his duties ; and the expression 'gone down,' with reference to him, needs no explanation. There was no chance of mistaking Bacchus ; he was very near me, and past all controversy, rather in nectar. Neptune, in the disguise of a waterman to a cabstand, was leaning with his head over the edge of the gallery, as if he were sea-sick. And as for the god Pluto, a moment's thought reminded me that he could not be here ; he would be in the pit, of course. So there they swarmed expectant, those happy gods ; lolling about with their coats off, drinking their nectar out of black bottles, and staring down, as many of them as were near the front, upon 'the gleaming world' beneath.

But, hark ! the cry is Silence. The overture ceases ; the patron of the fortunate musician murmurs, referring to his protégé's fiddle : 'Hunscrew him, Jemmy—hunscrew him : that's right, my boy ; don't keep him too taut. Ah, that is a hinstrument !' The curtain rises, and the gods, with one consent, cheer the entrance of Iago and Roderigo. About the acting, I have nothing to say, except that everybody, especially Spangles, was applauded ; and that, before the play was done, everybody, especially Spangles, was hoarse ; that, to my eyes, situated as I was at the very back of the gallery, and looking down upon the stage through two ambrosial whiskers, each belonging to a different god, Spangles was foreshortened to that degree, that he looked little more than a-head and front, underneath which his feet worked backwards and forwards most absurdly ; and that, though it was with some difficulty that I heard Iago, and very often did not hear Desdemona at all, yet, whenever Spangles spoke, his voice filled the theatre like the roar of a lion. I looked round upon my companions, and was astonished at the fixed attention, the reverent silence that characterised the whole congregation. Except when they applauded, or interfered in the cause of order, they were as quiet as mice ; even murmured conversation

was silenced at once ; the footfall of any one moving about was sure to cause indignant remonstrances ; and Bacchus, who declined to hold his tongue when the curtain rose, and insisted upon singing that he wouldn't go home till morning, was summarily kicked out, and bidden to go home at once. The gods had eyes and ears for nothing but Shakspeare. I never saw in any other part of the theatre such deep attention as this. Here were artisans, navvies, porters, cabmen, and shop-boys listening to Shakspeare, as if they loved him—bending forward with an eagerness that was strangely at variance with the conduct of the better part of the audience. Position in the theatre may no doubt have something to do with this. If you are in the stalls, you lean back to look up to the stage ; whereas, if you are in the gallery, you bend forward to look down upon it, and bending forward is the attitude of attention. Then, again, stalls and boxes can hear what is said without straining their necks, and giving their whole mind to it. It is not necessary for the occupants of those parts of the house to put their heads on one side, so that the orifice of the ear may present its full front to the voice of the speaker ; neither are they obliged to make ear-trumpets of their hands in order to catch the sounds. But to say that the people in the gallery adopt these methods, is only to say that they put themselves to a great deal of inconvenience in their anxiety not to lose a single precious word ; besides, it is only at the very back of the gallery, where I was, that there is any difficulty in hearing. The people on the gallery-benches appeared to me to hear perfectly well.

But there is far more in it than this. No one, I am certain, who will regard the whole house with an impartial eye, but must confess that we in the gallery are the true patrons of the legitimate drama. Let those born to private boxes, like horses, or to stalls, like oxen, delight in the flimsy artificialities of opera, where heroes die to music, and heroines sing their French morals in Italian verse to the tune of fifty pounds a night ; let your tenants of the circle and the pit revel in the broad fun of farce, and go into ecstasies over the driveling nonsense of burlesque, which, having undertaken to shew up the folly of opera, has succeeded in most effectually discovering its own : we in the gallery care little for any of these things. We want something real, something serious, and Shakspeare is the man for us. Why, while the gentle-folk below are lolling back in their arm-chairs, sighing and yawning, look at us in the gallery. Do we gape or sigh wearily ? Look how we, with our coats off, and our sleeves turned up, so that we may have the full use of our faculties, hang on the inspired words ! See how we bend over the iron rail, or hold it in our mouths like a bit, as if to curb our wild enthusiasm, and keep ourselves from shouting our admiration in the middle of a sentence ! Look how we are piled one upon the top of another, face rising above face like the heap of heads at the gate of Samaria ! Observe how every action and sentiment find their instant echo in the gallery ! Othello is suddenly overcome with the conviction of his wife's faithlessness. To express that conviction, he rolls his eyes, and grasps his throat, as if choking. We, responsive to the magic of the scene, stare like him, and, like him, clutch our gullets. And now the jealous Moor, fury in his heart, bursts into a torrent of wrath, raves against the guiltless Desdemona for her

supposed inconstancy, and carried this way and that by the gusts of passion, rages by turns against his wife, his friend, and himself, till he is completely out of breath, and must be quite independent of his dye, being black in the face from natural causes. Then our pent-up admiration makes itself heard. Taking advantage of the full stop, we rise like one man, and shout our approval with a voice as loud as Othello's own.

No one can doubt who sees them, that these uneducated people in the gallery delight in what they have heard much more than the well-educated people below. And why is this? I don't believe for an instant that the better classes are insensible to the power and beauty of Shakspeare. I believe, on the contrary, that they (sometimes) read him at home, and heartily admire and love him. Then why is it that, when he is acted, it is only the most uneducated persons amongst the audience who seem thoroughly to relish what they hear?

It was this question that I was revolving in my mind as I paced along Oxford Street on my way home, and had the happiness to come upon the row that I have described at the beginning of this paper; and it was the sudden light that this row threw upon my reflections that made me smile my thigh, and exclaim: 'Spangles, of course.' This costermonger, under the belief that his wife had been insulted, raged and roared exactly as Spangles's Othello did when under the belief that Desdemona was untrue. My difficulty was solved at once. The real reason why a tragedy of Shakspeare is more acceptable to the uneducated part of the audience than to the educated, is because the way in which the ordinary tragic actor of the day, with one or two exceptions, delineates the intenser passions, strikes the gallery as true to nature, and strikes the boxes and stalls as untrue. When Othello raves, and foams, and yells, as Spangles forces him to do, the people in the stalls know perfectly well that a gentleman, however jealous he might be, would not behave in that way. The gallery, on the contrary, instantly acknowledges the truth of such a representation of jealousy. Every man of them feels that, if he were in Othello's case, he should roar as Spangles does; and every howl of the actor's reminds him of his own or his friend's conduct when under the influence of strong passion. What, therefore, to the gallery is a close and masterly imitation, to the stalls is a piece of vulgar blatant exaggeration.

I shall not take upon myself to decide which is the correct view to hold as regards Spangles's acting. I will only say that I have no wish that the tameness, against which Hamlet warns his players, should be characteristic of ours. If there is any one who cannot understand how passion can be expressed without noise, let him go upon the stage at once; he is certain to succeed as a tragic actor. The gods will love him, and if he do not break a blood-vessel early in his career—for 'whom the gods love die young' remember—he will no doubt be in time considered one of the lights of the stage. But sound is no more passion than the binding in the book, than the frame is the picture.

And of a truth I felt, as I stood in the gallery that evening, that, put the picture into how wretched soever a frame—a frame heavy in design, and of the loudest pattern—yet the picture is still there in marvellous beauty. A play of Shakspeare, represented even in this way, must do these

people good. It must awaken in them the sense of admiration for what is beautiful and pure, and of hatred for what is cruel and treacherous. And it did me good, too, to stand there with Shakspeare's lines ringing in my ears, and their manifest influence upon others working before my eyes, and to feel, more strongly than I ever felt before, that to enjoy him, who of all poets is the most natural, no great amount of wisdom or learning is required; that rich and poor, and vulgar and refined, can all discover stores of delight in him; and that the magic touch with which he has represented nature, does indeed make 'the whole world kin.'

#### THE ROUND-FISH.

WHEREVER uncivilised man, guided by an unseen power, has been directed to take up his abode, there materials for the supply of food and clothing, such as are best suited to his wants and requirements, are invariably found. The cocoa-palm furnishes meat, drink, raiment, cordage, houses, boats, sails, drinking-cups, and paddles to the tenants of tropic islands. The banana, plantain, and maize find the Mexicans in all they need. Whales, seals, and other oil-yielding monsters, carry life and light to the dwellers in hyperboreal regions. In like manner, the round-fish and the salmon are essential supplies, floated free of all freight, up to the very wigwams of the savages occupying the lands of British Columbia.

The cedar yields him wood for his canoes, planks for his winter-houses, hafts for his spears, shafts for his arrows, paddles, drinking-vessels, and firewood; from the roots, he constructs hats and baskets; with the outer bark, he builds his rude summer lodges; from the inner, he spins ropes. Native hemp grows on the banks of every stream and rivulet, wherewith he cleverly makes cord for his fishing-nets. The back-tendon of the wapiti furnishes an admirable thread, with which the squaws stitch their skin-cloths and moccasins. But the winters are long, dreary, and intensely cold, the deep snow putting an effectual stop to hunting or trapping. Starve the Redskin must, with both cold and hunger, did he not harvest a crop, dry it, and carefully store it away, to meet the privations of a seven months' winter.

It is not chance that directs the round-fish to quit the sea, and ascend the streams in October, for the purpose of depositing its spawn; it has another and a higher destiny to serve. The same Hand that guided the savage to people this far-away land, sent the finny hosts also, impelled by resistless instinct, to thread their way to the remotest camping-ground of the savage, following the tortuous water-ways that from the very mountain summits roll on, gathering strength as they go, to be swallowed up at last in the vast Pacific.

Late in September, and during the earlier part of October, the round-fish (*Coregonus quadrilateralis* of ichthyologists) ascend the Fraser in countless numbers, branching off into every tributary, and steadily working their way, arrive at last on their favourite spawning-grounds. There are few of the finny tribe more agreeable to the eye, or toothsome to the palate; claiming kindred with the aristocratic *Salmonidae*, the round-fish is fairly entitled to all the praise and attention bestowed on him alike by red and white men. This beautiful fish is, to all the Indians west of the Rocky

Mountains, what the *Attihawmeg* is to the tribes residing on the eastern slopes. The jaw-breaking Indian name means, when reduced to pronounceable English, *Reindeer of the Sea*—the white-fish of the voyageur, trader, and trapper; *Coregonus albula* of the learned. The Redskin's name for the fish is, after all, the best and most appropriate. Several powerful tribes entirely subsist on the 'reindeer of the sea' for nine months of the twelve, and at many of the fur-trading stations, they get but a scant allowance (during the colder months) of anything but white-fish, either frozen or dried. I may cite one 'take' as an example of the prodigal abundance of the white-fish east of the Rockies.

In a small lake named Lake St Ann, near Fort Edmonton, forty thousand white-fish were taken in three weeks, the average weight of each fish being about three pounds, and this with the rudest appliances for fishing.

Our friend the round-fish is not by any means eclipsed or cast in the shade by his eastern brother, as regards utility or numbers.

My tent was pitched on the bank of a small stream, that, clear as crystal, and icy cold, twisted its way in many a bend through the Sunnase prairie; here widening out into glassy pools, girt with a miniature forest of rushes and sedge plants, and there narrowing in, to be lost under the shelving banks. To the sportsman, or lover of the picturesque, few spots offer greater attractions than does this lovely patch of prairie; situated at the base of a lofty pile of densely-timbered hills, spurs of the Cascade Mountains, easily accessible from the Fraser river by boat, or, what is far preferable, a canoe paddled by Indians. Sitting at the entrance to my canvas-house, before me towered up a series of mountain-peaks, those of lesser altitude densely clothed with pine and cedar, that on the more lofty summits dwindled off into rock, snow, mist, and cloudy obscurity. To my left, and behind, the Sunnase lake filled up the foreground, fringed with poplar, birch, and willow; to my right, the emerald green prairie stretched away, a rolling sea of grass and flowers, to the Sunnase river, that, like a line of flowing silver, skirted the bases of some rounded knolls that shut off both river and prairie from the muddy Fraser.

To the sportsman, it offered a preserve so filled with game of all sorts that the excessive abundance really palled the pleasure of shooting. On the pools, flocks of stock-duck, teal, widgeon, shovellers, whistle-wings, and spirit-ducks floated idly about, fishing, pluming, quarrelling, and flirting; crowding all the swampy spots round about the lake, were busy little brant, crafty Canada, and noisy laughing geese. On the lake, trumpeter swans glided about, with their dingy brown cygnets. Snipe, continually flushed under one's feet, flew only a short distance in angular course, then quietly dropped again amidst the grass.

Leave the open prairie, and wander into the 'bush'; amidst the belt-timber, the ruffed grouse hardly condescends to get out of your way, but perched on branch or log, stares with stupid curiosity at such an unusual apparition. Dive deeper in, and the crashing sticks tell you that a herd of wapiti, or gray deer, are aware of your intrusion; climb on to the craggy pile of lichen-clad rocks just ahead, and you may be pretty sure that bear, black or grizzly, will be there, ready to dispute your right of forest.

The Indian summer was drawing to a close, the

trees shading the winding water-ways had assumed their autumnal fashions, and clad in bright yellows and browns, contrasted prettily with the darker liveries of the forest. The prairie was like a fair. Thickly dotting the banks of the many small streams that flowed through it, were scores of Indian lodges, of all shapes and sizes—some constructed of buffalo-hide, others of rushes and cedar-mats. Indians, old and young—whose costumes were more remarkable for extreme simplicity than elegance, and varied only betwixt a blanket or nothing—were all alike busy capturing the 'round-fish' that had just commenced ascending the streams in countless thousands. So massed were the silvery legions, that baits, traps, even nets were thrown aside, whilst baskets, wooden bowls, and hands did the work; the savages, simply standing in the water, baled out the fish, just as sprats are shovelled into the scale when weighed for sale.

Thousands of fish were drying, quantities had been devoured, and as many more were wasting and rotting on the banks. If we could suppose every fish to escape Indians, otters, and other enemies, and succeed in depositing its spawn, perhaps about 3000 eggs, where or how they would ever find room enough to manage it, or what would become of the offspring, is more than I can tell.

All the fish obtained are not baled out; where they are less numerous, or in deeper water, other means are resorted to. Boys, girls, and squaws catch great numbers by using a hook and line; the line, about eight feet long, is tied to the end of a short stick, and baited with roe which has been dried in the sun—a process that gives it a rank, disagreeable odour to the nose human, but increases its power to attract epicurean round-fish. I tried my powers of persuasion by tying together on a hook a bundle-like affair, compounded of red wool from my blanket, duck's feathers, the *ruff* from the neck of a grouse—the whole showily lighted up and finished off with tinsel and a bit of gold-lace. This I called a *fly*. Although unlike anything that ever was created, or ever will be, it answered the purpose beyond my most sanguine anticipations. My fly was made fast to a strong cord; the cord to the end of a young larch. Plied with both hands, it circled gracefully round my head, and plunged into the water with a splash like a small anchor. Round-fish are clearly braver than trout are in our streams; instead of being scared at such an unusual monster, leaping into the midst of them, they rushed at him, greedily seized, and would have swallowed hook, feathers, and all, had not a sudden transition from the stream to its bank frustrated their intention, and demonstrated the folly of judging by appearances. Thus I whacked out fish after fish, to the intense delight of the dingy young savages, who one and all immediately set to work manufacturing monsters.

Another system by which immense quantities of fish are taken is a regular 'Indian basket-trick.' The basket is most ingeniously and skilfully contrived; in shape it resembles a colossal sugar-loaf, with a very young one inside it. The smaller end has a hole in it, affording the unsuspecting fish an easy entrance; but once through the lesser cone-like basket, all chance of retreat is cut off—they are prisoners without the faintest hope of escape. The basket, is made of split vine-maple, lashed together with strips of cedar-bark. The baskets vary in

capacity, but the usual size is about twenty feet in length, and nine feet in circumference. The trap set in the centre of the stream, wicker-dams are constructed, preventing any passing on either side of it. The round-fish working steadily up in the current, run their noses against the dam, then blunder about, puzzled at the unusual obstruction; at last, in great measure directed by the swifter water, they discover a nice round hole, through which it flows; in go the finders, and perhaps, in fish-language, call to their lagging comrades to follow, and fear not; and thus a steady inflow of fishes rapidly fills the basket. When incapable of containing any more, it is dragged ashore, and a fresh one set in its place. Landed, its contents are tumbled on the grass. Anxiously awaiting this discharge of round-fishes, sit a circle of grim, dirty, blear-eyed Indian women, of varying ages, each armed with a knife, while tied to their waists are bundles of small sticks. Near them are poles stretched on other poles driven into the ground, like small gibbets, under each of which a fire smoulders. Judging rashly, one might suppose these amiable-looking Hecates suspended their dingy offspring on them; but if we wait patiently for a short time, we shall discover what they really are used for. Rushing pell-mell on the struggling heap, each seizes a fish, and with dextrous thrust, rips it open from end to end; a sudden twist removes the head and inside, a rub on the grass the blood and dirt; a couple of the waist-sticks, placed cross-wise, prevents the split fish from closing; then the operator throws it on the ground, and clutches another. Girls are busy picking up the fish thus split and skewered by their more practised seniors, and stringing them on the gibbets. The fish are not hung up side by side, but one before the other, as if marching in single-file.

The fires under the fish serve two purposes—one, to aid in their preservation by imparting the 'kyamizing' power of wood-smoke; the other, to keep away flies, wasps, and hornets, members of the insect world most disreputable and thievish in their habits.

The curing process, in which salt *never* takes any part, is complete in about fourteen days. Then the poles are stripped, and the dried round-fish packed tightly in small bales, covered with rush-mats, are securely strapped with rude cordage spun from cedar-bark.

The fishing season at an end, lodges are struck, and baskets hid for the coming year. The take equitably divided, canoes heavily laden with men, women, children, dogs, and bales of fish, paddled by stalwart arms, glide smoothly down the smaller streams to reach the lake. No creak or splash of oar, or boisterous mirth, marks the progress of this quaint-looking fleet, the soft rhythm of the many paddles alone breaks the silence. The lake crossed, the Sumass river is descended; and the large cedar-huts, constructed of planks, like huge menageries, built in sheltered nooks along the Fraser, receive their various inmates, therein to pass away the long, weary, biting months of winter, hard to bear at best: but all the warmth derivable from fur, fir, and shelter would be of little avail to resist and withstand the gripe of 'the ice-king'; fuel must be swallowed; the life-stove must be kept alight, and burning briskly too, inside the body as well as out; and this fuel the savage has in his bales of round-fish, just as essential to him as coals are to us.

There is but little demand on his muscular system during the cold months; the temperature 30 degrees below zero, deep snow on the ground, and the streams all frozen over, forbids all outdoor exercise or employment; his system of living is reduced to a state very analogous to hibernation; heat and not flesh making materials are what he needs, and in fish, oily and fat, he has them in their most perfect form—free of all cost—without risk from fire-damp, foul air, or being buried alive, the redskin gathers his heat-making crop from the water, in harvest regularly sent for his use, as the cycle of the seasons run their course.

### MIRK ABBEY.

#### CHAPTER V.—MASTER WALTER.

THE day after Christmas Day was friendly to the fox; in other words, a hard frost; and since Miss Rose Aynton and Letty had declined to play at billiards with Walter until the afternoon—for it is vicious (in the country) to indulge in that pastime in the morning, as it is to play at cards before candlelight—that young gentleman, being no reader, felt the time rather heavy on his hands, and strolled into the village to get rid of it. The snow had ceased to fall, but not before, like a good housekeeper when the family has left town, it had covered up everything very carefully, except the tops of the chimneys, through which the tidings of good-cheer rolled forth in dusky columns from every cottage; for there were no abject poor in Mirk, thanks to my Lady, or any that lacked victuals at that joyous season. The Lisgards had ever been a free-handed race, as generous out of doors as hospitable within; and their influence for good had been felt for generations throughout the village. I do not say that they expected no repayment; their rule was paternal, and they looked for something like filial obedience in return. If a villager had passed any member of that august family without pulling his hair, as though it were a bell-handle, in token of respect, it would have been considered a sign of revolution, and they would have congratulated themselves that the yeomanry were in a state of efficiency. The feudal system was still in vogue at Mirk, but tempered not only by excellent beef-tea in sickness, and port wine from the Abbey cellar during convalescence, but by the best Gothic architecture, as applied to cottages. If eleven human beings did sometimes sleep in a single room, and the domestic arrangements were inferior to those which Mr Chifney of the Farm provided for his race-horses, the tenement looked outside very picturesque, as seen from the Abbey windows. Nay, it must be owned that even this inconvenience of over-crowding was rare in the home-village, in comparison with other places on the Lisgard estate, not so near the family seat, about which everything was in externals, at least, becomingly spick and span.

Dr Haldane, indeed, who had property of his own, and could afford to entertain political opinions at variance with those in favour at the Abbey, had been of old accustomed irreverently to adapt a certain popular nursery ballad to the state of things at Mirk.

Who built the infant school so red?  
Who set that striking-clock o'erhead,  
To tell us all the time for bed?

The Lisgards.

Who made, and at such great expense,  
Around our pond that iron fence,  
To keep the pigs and boys from thence?

The Lisgards, &c.

In short, Mirk was a pet hamlet, and exhibited a hundred tokens of its patron's favour. It was surely only right and proper, therefore, that all the votes in the village at election-time, except the doctor's, went the same way with the squire's, and that even in social matters he exercised unquestioned sway. Mirk was as respectable as the brotherhood of Quakers, and was rendered so by the same simple machinery; any one in the place who shewed a disposition to be otherwise was immediately turned out. Did a man drink, so as to cause public disturbance, or pick up sticks (to save himself trouble) out of the park-fences—or, worse than all, did he Poach—were it but a pheasant's egg—he received the most peremptory notice to quit the model village. The issuing of these ukases of banishment had been, now and then, a severe trial to the popularity of the Lisgards; but it had overlived all such acts—nay, more, even its favouritism, that seemingly indispensable element of the feudal system, had been forgiven it. Nobody now complained that George Steve, who notoriously never went to bed quite sober, still continued tenant of the *Lisgard Arms*; while Jacob Flail and Joseph Dibble had been condemned, with their families, to banishment for life for a less habitual commission of the same offence.

Much less did it strike the villagers that it was inconsistent in a landlord, so careful for the morality of his people, to let so large a portion of the Abbey Farm to a trainer of race-horses, of which there were at present upwards of thirty in Mirk; and in summer, when the Downland above was fit for their exercise, there were often twice as many. But then Mr Chifney was not like an ordinary trainer; nor did his jockey-boys, thanks to his strict supervision, behave like ordinary jockey-boys. They attended divine service on alternate Sundays, and half a dozen of them were in the choir. Mr Moseley (who was Anglican) had even taken into consideration the advisability of putting these last into surplices, but Mr Chifney had dissuaded him from that experiment. They had always been accustomed to the most tight-fitting of garments, strait-waistcoats, buck-skin breeches, and gaiters—and perhaps he thought the transition would be too abrupt. Their habits, in some other respects, were loose, and yet they were suffered to breathe the Lisgard air. Mr Chifney's boys were like the servants of ambassadors at foreign courts, who enjoy a separate jurisdiction from that to which the native inhabitants submit. The law itself—at least in the case of petty offences—was not called in to punish these young gentlemen; but I believe they were ‘colted’—for the whole discipline was ‘horsey’—by Mr Chifney’s head-groom. I do not know the exact manner in which this chastisement was inflicted, but it must have differed from the ordinary method, since they never failed to pursue their daily equestrian duties as usual. Mr Chifney looked after that himself, and exceedingly sharp. Nothing went amiss through oversight in his establishment, and his employers had every reason to put confidence in him. He left no means untried to insure the success of the costly animals it was his mission to groom and guard. His very acceptance of the post of churchwarden

had been described by his enemies as an attempt to ‘hedge’—to make friends with those powers of good which are generally supposed to be antagonistic, if they have anything to do with it at all, to the profession of horse-racing. It is certain that Mr Chifney, whose occupations seldom permitted his own attendance at public worship, never failed to come to church upon those Sundays which immediately preceded the Derby and the St Leger, and indeed it is very likely that he treated them (without knowing it) as the eyes of his patron saints’ days.

It was to the Abbey Farm that Mr Walter Lisgard was now bound; for to the young gentlemen of England, what is a more interesting spectacle than a racing-stable—what is a more charming subject of conversation than the next Great Event? And who more fitted to afford every information upon that important topic—if he chose—than Mr Tite Chifney? If he chose. Therein lay the whole matter; for Mr Chifney was reticent, as became one intrusted with a hundred thousand pounds’ worth of horseflesh, upon whose performances depended perhaps, in the aggregate, millions of money. He had put ‘Master Walter’ up to a ‘good thing,’ however, more than once, and the captain had no doubt but that he would do it again. He never did doubt of his own success either with man or woman. Confidence, but without swagger, self-content, but without vanity, were evident enough in those handsome features, illuminated almost at all times with the desire to please. He lit his cigar at the hall-door, smoothed away a fallen spark from his sealskin waistcoat, and took his way down the leafless avenue, humming the latest lively air, as he crunched the snow beneath his dainty boots. How different from Sir Richard’s measured step and haughty silence, thought the gatekeeper’s wife, as she hastened out of the lodge, from the side-window of which she had marked her favourite approach. ‘Never mind me, Martha,’ cried he laughing; ‘I’m tall enough now to lift the latch for myself. My boots are thicker than yours are—look—and I have no rheumatism, which, I am afraid, you have not quite got rid of yet. There—I won’t speak a word with you till you go inside. How’s the guidman? Ah, out is he? How’s little Polly? Hullo, Polly, how you’re grown! Why, I daresay she won’t kiss me now, as she always used to do.’

‘O yes, she’ll kiss you, Master Walter,’ answered the old dame; ‘there’s no harm in kissing o’ *you*; although I wouldn’t say that to my daughter of ne’er another young man in the county.—Come, lass, you need not blush so, for I’ve had many a one from the same young gentleman.’ And the old dame laughed and chuckled, until that dread enemy of honest-hearted mirth, the lumbago, twitched her into her chair.

Polly, a very pretty country lassie, about sixteen, stood pink and hesitating while the captain removed his cigar, and waited—smiling demigod—for the promised favour.

‘Come, gi’e it to him, and ha’ done wi’ it,’ cried the old lady, exasperated by her torments. Thereupon the girl stepped forward, head aside. Master Walter met her, touched her soft cheek with his lip, and as his silken moustache brushed her ear, whispered an airy something which turned her crimson. There was nothing in the words themselves save the merest compliment; their magic lay in the tone of him who used

them ; so tender, yet so frank, so familiar, and yet so gracious. Then, with a smile, he bade them both 'good-bye,' and strolling through the gate, resumed his interrupted duty, as though kissing were the most innocent as well as the most natural of all pastimes ; but Polly pressed her throbbing brow against the pane for its very coolness, and watched him saunter down the village street with quite a flutter at her heart, and promised to herself that she would not forget the captain's kiss—no, not though Joe, the under-gardener, should speak his mind next 'feast' (as it was rumoured in well-informed circles that he intended to do), and 'keep her company' in earnest.

That she was doing no wrong in this was certain, for not only her mother, but everybody else in Mirk agreed that there was no sort of harm in Master Walter, let him do what he might. He had a way of doing things so very different from others. How the very dogs fawned upon him as he sauntered on, and the old horse in the straw-yard stretched its gray head over the gate in hopes of a caress as he went by ! How the boys by the roadside left their Snow-man an unfinished torso, and ran to make their bows before the good-natured captain, with an eye to *largeesse*, in the form of a copper scramble ; and how the school-girls courtesied, with admiring awe, as they pictured to themselves how fine a figure handsome Master Walter must needs cut in gold and scarlet ! He had a nod or a word for almost everybody, young or old ; but if his look but lit upon another's face, it left a pleasure there, as the Sun leaves when it has shone upon one. Delayed by these reciprocal manifestations of good-will, like a young prince making a royal Progress among a well-affected people, Walter Lisgard at length got free of the village, and climbing a steep hill (never used by the racehorses even in much less slippery weather), arrived at his destination, the Abbey Farm. This was a long, low, ancient building, belonging to one could scarce tell what date, so pieced, and restored, and added to, had been the original structure ; but when the Abbey was an Abbey, the Abbey Farm had been a sort of branch-establishment, in the occupation of the monks ; there were traces of their sojourn even now : over the pointed porch yet stood a cross of stone, though broken ; and in the garden, now all white and hoar, that lay between the house and road, there was a mighty sun-dial, carved like a font with noseless saints in niches, and round the rim a scripture, of which alone the words *nos renit* could be deciphered. The night had come, not only upon those who built and blessed such things, but on the faith which they professed. The very memory of themselves and it had faded from men's minds. Not one in ten at Mirk—where all had owned the Abbot for liege lord, and bowed their heads before his meanest monk, in token of their soul's humility, but a few centuries back—not one in ten, I say, could tell even what that niche on the south side of the communion-table meant, which the learned called *Piscina*. The mighty bower that had once been the granary of the Abbey, and to which the poor had looked with thankful eyes in times of scarcity, still stood beside the homestead, but the remembrance of its very use was gone ; the only legend clinging to its moss-grown walls was that a Long Parliament had once held its sittings there. Save the farmhouse and the barn, all relics of the past had been swept away. Immediately behind them

was quite a town of stables and loose-boxes, all of the most modern construction, and furnished with the latest inventions for equine comfort. The enormous farmyard, strewn with a thick carpet of clean straw, was now the exercising-ground for the horses ; but in the summer, a gate at the back of the premises opened immediately upon the grassy upland, the proximity of which had tempted Mr Tite Chifney to pitch his tent and enlarge his boundaries at the Abbey Farm. So high had been the rent he offered for this eligible situation, that the late Sir Robert had removed his own agricultural head-quarters elsewhere, and suffered Mr Chifney and his racehorses to occupy the whole place, which was now the capital of the Houwhy-hims—the largest establishment in Great Britain, wherein man held the secondary position, and the Horse the principal.

#### CHAPTER VI.—THE RACING-STABLE.

It was Mr Chifney in person who admitted Walter Lisgard, after a precautionary glance at him through a little grating, which doubtless the monks had used for a similar purpose, although without the same excuse, for they had never possessed any Derby 'cracks' to be poisoned. Mr Chifney might have been himself a monk but for his apparel, which, although scrupulously neat and plain, fitted him almost like war-paint, so that there was not a crease to be seen, except at the knees, of which he made as much use as the holy fathers themselves did, though not precisely in the same way. His dark hair was closely cropped, and a little bald spot on the top of the crown might well have been taken for a tonsure. Moreover, he had a grave and secretive look, which would have well enough become one in whom were reposed the secrets of the Confessional ; and when he smiled, he looked sorry for it immediately afterwards, as though he had given way to a carnal pleasure.

Captain Lisgard shook the trainer's hand with his usual hearty warmth, and Mr Chifney returned his pressure with unwonted cordiality. He was accustomed to meet men of a much higher social rank than his present visitor on something like equal terms ; many of them shook hands with him ; all of them treated him with familiarity. The Turf, like the Grave, levels all distinctions. Between the Lord and the Blackleg (to make an antithetical use of terms that are not seldom synonymous), there is but slight partition on that common ground ; the widest gulf of social difference is bridged over, *pro tem.*, by the prospect of an advantageous bet. How much more, then, was this wont to be the case in view of the trustworthy 'information' which Mr Tite Chifney had it so often in his power to bestow ? Marquises had taken his arm in a confidential manner before now in the most public places, and dukes had called him 'Tite,' even ladies of the highest fashion had treated him to pretty speeches, and to what they hoped might turn out literally 'winning ways.' But the great trainer estimated all these condescensions at their true value. He never concealed from himself the motives that caused these people to be so civil to him ; and perhaps he had seen too much of the turfite aristocracy to be flattered by their attentions, even had they been disinterested. But Walter Lisgard's greeting was different from those which he was wont to receive from his great patrons ; there was not only a cordial frankness about it, but a something of sympathy, conveyed with marvellous

tact, in his air and manner ; which seemed to say : 'I unfeignedly regret that anything like friendship should be impossible between us, for I am your social superior ; and yet, how ridiculous a thing it is that this should be so ! I, but the younger brother of a man himself of no great position, and you, at the head of that profession in which the noblest in the land take so great and personal an interest.' If Mr Chifney did not read all this, it is certain that so acute an observer could not fail to read some of it. He was as far from being moved by any considerations not strictly practical as any man connected with horseflesh ; his calling, too, rendered him as suspicious of his fellow-creatures as a police detective ; but Master Walter's sort of flattery was too subtle for him. He had always had a liking for this genial young fellow, with his handsome face and pleasant speech, and who, moreover, rode across country like a centaur ; he was one of his own landlord's family, too, and the heir-presumptive of the property, whose favour it was just as well to win and keep ; and lastly, the lad had been so unfeignedly grateful to him for the little hints he had occasionally afforded him, as well as so wisely reticent about his informant, that he was not unwilling to help him again to a few 'fivers,' if he could do so without the betrayal of professional confidence.

'Come for another "tip," eh, Master Walter ?' whispered he good-naturedly as he led the way into the house. 'You see I did not deceive you the last time you were here about *Cambyses* !'

'No, indeed, you did not, Mr Chifney' (Walter never addressed this friend of his without the *Mister*), 'and a very great blessing it was to yours thankfully at a time when he was even more hard-up than usual. Is your Derby "crack" visible to-day ? I am poor, but honest. I have no motive beyond that of curiosity, and if suspected of a concealed weapon, will submit to be searched.'

'Well, Master Walter,' grinned the trainer, 'I can't say that I much credit the honesty of anybody myself ; but I don't see why you should not have a look at his majesty, particularly as there is one coming here this morning already upon the same errand, and I'm sure I'd as soon oblige you as him—or, indeed, as any man, let it be who it will.'

'You are very kind to say so, Mr Chifney, and still more to mean it, as I am sure you do ; but I feel that I have no right with my bagatelle of a stake depending upon the matter to take up your time—nay, I must insist upon throwing my cigar away before entering your house ; it is all very well for Mrs Chifney to give you the privilege of smoking within doors, but I could not venture to take such a liberty myself. What a jolly place this is of yours ; I always think it is so much snugger than the Abbey. I should never sit anywhere but in your grand old kitchen, if I were you.'

'Well, the fact is we do sit a good deal in the kitchen,' returned Mr Chifney reddening. 'It's warm, you see, although it's large, and my wife likes to see how things are going on. She's engaged there just at present, and—you're a great favourite of hers ; but I would recommend you to step in as you go out, instead of now. A queer thing is woman, Master Walter, and no man can tell how queer till he comes to be married ! Young gals is all sweetness and easily cajoled ; but wives—O lor ! Now, it's exactly different with horseflesh, for the brood-mares one can manage with a little care, and it's only the fillies that

give us trouble, and have such tempers of their own. There ; that's a Derby nag, *Blue Ruin*, in the cloths yonder, and I believe the duke would not sell him for three thousand pounds ; but I have told His Grace, as I tell you, that I wouldn't back the horse even for a place.'

'A splendid stepper, too,' exclaimed Walter admiringly, as the beautiful creature paced slowly round the straw-yard, with arching neck and distended nostrils, as though he were aware of the trainer's depreciating remarks, and could afford to despise them.

'That's true,' rejoined Mr Chifney drily ; 'but we don't want steppers, but goers ; there's a vast of steppers in this world, both men and horses.—Now, in that box yonder, there is an animal who, in my opinion, could give *Blue Ruin* ten pounds ; but you shall judge for yourself presently. *The King's* palace is this next one.'

And truly, scarce could horse be better housed than was his equine majesty. No light-house could be more exquisitely clean ; no drawing-room in Mayfair more neat, or better suited to the requirements of its inhabitant, although of ornament, save the plaited straw that fringed the royal couch, there was nothing. A dim religious light pervaded this sanctuary, which was kept at a moderate temperature by artificial means, while an admirable ventilation prevented the slightest 'smell of the stable' from being perceptible. The object of all this consideration was a magnificent bay horse, by rule of *Liliput*, very fitly named *The King*, since, if not a head taller than his fellows, he was fully 'a hand.' His coat quite shone amid the gloom, and as the key turned in the door, he pricked his long fine ears, and turned his full eyes upon his two visitors inquiringly, with far more expression in his lean-jawed face than is possessed by many a human creature.

'This gives the world assurance of a horse indeed,' muttered Walter to himself as he contemplated this wonder. 'Shew me his faults, Mr Chifney, for his excellences dazzle me.'

'Well, sir,' whispered the trainer, looking up towards a square hole in the ceiling, 'it is not for me to depurate "the crack;" and there's a boy up yonder—for the horse is never left for a moment, night or day—who is getting too sharp to live, at least in my stables. But look at what he stands on.'

Most men who ride think it a disgrace not to know all about a horse. Every man who keeps a pony thinks himself qualified to 'pick' out the winner from any number of thoroughbreds before 'the start,' and when the race is over, protests that he had picked him out in his own mind, only something (not quite satisfactorily explained) made him distrust his own judgment, and back a loser.

It was a great temptation to Captain Walter Lisgard, of the 104th Light Dragoons, to shew himself horse-wise, but he put it from him manfully, or rather with strength of mind far beyond that of most men of his class. 'The pasterns seem to be long and strong enough,' answered he, 'and the feet neither too large nor too small.'

'Just what my lord says,' observed the trainer in the same low tones ; 'nor can I make him see that there is any degree of contraction. But he is not your horse, so tell me ; look now—is it not so ?'

It was so, or at least it seemed to be so to the captain, as the trainer returned the faulty member to its proprietor, with the air of a banker declining a forged cheque.

'It is of small consequence to me,' said Walter; 'but I shall be sorry if the winner does not come out of your stable. I took a thousand to twenty in October, which I can now hedge to great advantage.'

'If you take my advice, you will hold on,' said Mr Chifney confidentially. 'Twenty pound is little to lose, and what I have shewn you by no means destroys his chance; moreover, *The King* will not be deposed in the betting. I shall be surprised if, in the paddock, they lay more than three to one.'

'You were going to tell me something, Mr Chifney, only you thought better of it,' said Captain Lisgard, laying his finger upon the other's coat-cuff, as they emerged from the royal presence. 'And yet you trusted me when I was but a boy at school, and I never abused your confidence.'

'What a fellow you are to read a chap!' returned the trainer admiringly. 'Burst my buttons, but you are a cunning one, Master Walter! It is true that I was thinking of letting you into a little secret—though, after all, it mayn't be worth much. Let us come on to the tan-gallop for five minutes, for nowhere else can we get out of earshot of these boys.' With that, passing through a paddock, itself provided with a straw-ride, so that the race-horses need not set foot upon the frost-bound turf as they issued forth to exercise, Mr Chifney led the way to the upland, where a broad brown road of tan was permanently laid on the level down. Here the trainer paused, and speaking aloud for the first time, observed in a solemn tone: 'Now, look you, true as fate, I would tell no other man but you. What I said about *The King's* feet was on the square: but that ain't all. There's a horse here as nobody ever heard of, and yet who's a real good un. He's the one that I said could give *Blue Ruin* ten pounds. You may get two hundred to one against him at this blessed moment, and he'll be at twenty to one before April Fool Day. It's the best thing we've had at Mirk yet, and—Ah, the devil! here comes the man I was expecting; remember we were talking about *The King*.'

'Morning, Mr Chifney,' said the new-comer, nodding familiarly to the trainer.—'And morning to you, sir, if you ain't too proud to accept it.'

He was a large-built middle-aged man, with a sunburnt countenance, generally good-humoured enough, notwithstanding the presence of a truculent red beard, but upon this occasion, somewhat sullen, and even defiant. Walter recognized in him the stranger stopping at the *Lisgard Arms*, at once, and was at no loss to account for his displeasure. He had doubtless received some hint that his presence at the Abbey would not be welcome.

'Good-morning, Mr Derrick,' returned the captain cheerfully. 'There is no pride about me, since, unfortunately, I have nothing to be proud of; but if there was, why should I not return a civil reply to a civil speech?'

'Oh, because I ain't good enough to speak to,' answered the other scornfully. 'Because I ain't a gentleman, forsooth, like your high and mighty family. But the fact is, sir, although I have got decent blood in my veins myself, I come from a country where we don't care that—and he snapped his fingers with a noise equal to the crack of a whip—for who is a man's father, unless the man himself is worth his salt.'

'That, then, must have been the reason why this good-for-nothing ruffian left that country,' thought

the captain; but he answered with humility: 'Then, I fear, I should be giving up my best chance if I went there.'

'Well,' answered the stranger, somewhat mollified, 'you don't speak like one of them beastly aristocrats—that I will say—as though it were too much trouble to open their darned lips.'

Mr Derrick himself did not speak like an aristocrat either; his voice, though rich in song, had in speech a strong northern burr, which rescued it from any such imputations. 'Why, if a man in my country,' continued he, 'should venture to warn another off his land—unless, of course, it was a mining claim—as Sir Richard Lisgard!'

'Mr Derrick,' interrupted the captain firmly, 'I am sure that it is not the custom in any country in the world to abuse a man's brother to his face. Having said that much, I will add that, if you have received any rudeness from any one at the Abbey, I am sincerely sorry for it. It did not emanate from me. Mr Chifney here will give me a character so far.'

Master Walter is as civil-spoken and well-behaved a young gentleman as any in the county,' exclaimed the trainer warmly; 'and I will go bail has never given you or any man offence. He has just stepped in, like you, to see "the crack," on which he has a little money; and since I am not one of those who say: "It is no use now a days to attempt to take in your enemies, and therefore your friends must suffer," I have been giving him some advice.'

'About *Manylaws*?' inquired the stranger suspiciously, turning sharp round upon the captain.

The look of blank astonishment upon that gallant officer's face would have set at rest the doubts of a Pollaky.

'It is not my habit to disclose my customer's secrets,' observed the trainer tartly; 'although I may say that, with Master Walter, everything is as safe as wax.'

'Is it so?' quoth Mr Derrick warmly; 'then let him come with us and see the Black.—Only mind, Mr Walter Lisgard, I will not have that brother of yours bettered by a fourpenny-piece by anything you may see or hear to-day.'

'My brother never bets upon any race,' answered the captain quietly; 'so that promise is easily given.'

'Then come along with me and Mr Chifney,' said the stranger, holding out his hairy hand in token of amity. 'You've read a deal about that crack as I've just been looking at; but I dare say, now, you have never so much as heard of this same *Manylaws*.'

'Not unless you mean the French horse, about which there were a few lines in *Bell* some time ago—*Menelaus*.'

'Ay, that's him. But it's called *Manylaws*, explained Mr Derrick; 'for you wouldn't think of calling the Oaks' mare *Antigone*, I suppose, *Antigone*. Well, the Black ain't fancied much, I reckon; but he will be, Mr Chifney, oh? He will be!'

'It is my opinion that he will be at very short odds indeed,' returned the trainer; 'and many more people will be desirous of paying him a call than do him that honour just at present. This is his stable. He does not look quite such a likely horse as *The King*, Master Walter, does he? There's bone for you!'

'An ounce of blood is worth a pound of bone, says the proverb,' remarked the captain.

'So far as that goes, although he is a Frenchman,' answered the trainer, 'he has Godolphin's blood in his veins. But only look at his ragged hips!'

'Ragged enough, Mr Chifney. And do you mean to say that this animal will be a public favourite?'

'We hope not,' returned the trainer, winking facetiously at his bearded friend; 'but— Shall we tell him what we *do* hope, Mr Derrick?'

'I'll tell him myself,' quoth the other impulsively, 'for you say the young gentleman is safe, and I have taken a sort of unaccountable fancy to him. We hope, and more than that, believe, Captain Ligard, that that same ragged-hipped horse will win the Derby!'

'Two hundred to one against Mr Blanquette's *Menelaus*,' murmured Walter pathetically, as though it were a line from some poem of the affections.

'That's the present quotation,' answered Mr Derrick with a chuckle, and rattling a quantity of loose silver and gold in his breeches' pockets. 'Perhaps you would like to lay it in pomes with Mr Chifney and me.'

'No, Mr Derrick; but I should like to thank you very much for letting me into this secret, which, I assure you, shall never pass my lips,' and he held out his hand to the stranger.

'Our way lies together as far as the inn,' returned the other warmly; 'we'll liquor— But there; I forgot I was no longer in Cariboo. I dare say a gentleman like you *don't* liquor so early in the day.'

'At all events, I will walk with you, my good sir,' answered the captain laughing; and so, forgetting to repeat his request to be permitted to pay his respects to the trainer's wife, he took his departure with his new acquaintance.

'And who is this Monsieur Blanquette?' inquired Walter carelessly as they walked down the village street.

'He was a mate of mine at the gold-diggings in British Columbia, and the only Frenchman as ever I saw there. We did a pretty good stroke of work together; and when we came home, he invested his money in horseflesh, and that there *Manylaws* was one of his cheapest bargains.'

'I think I saw it stated somewhere that Mr Blanquette is only part-owner of the horse?' observed the captain inquiringly.

'That's so,' rejoined the other. 'It belongs to him and a company.'

'And you are the company, eh, Mr Derrick?'

'You have hit it,' responded the bearded man with the air of a proprietor. 'This here child is the *Co.* in question.'

#### THE ART OF TYING THE CRAVAT.

A VERY absurd but amusing old book fell into our hands the other day, and recalled a thousand recollections of the fantastic extravagance of fashion in the days when George IV. filled the throne.

It was a little volume, with a pink enamelled cover, and bore on one side a steel engraving of a Cupid seated, and holding over a large ledger the head of a most immaculate dandy, the neck encircled with an unwrinkled cravat, the ends of which, still untied, depended with exquisite grace. This remarkable work was entitled *The Art of Tying the Cravat*. It was the seventh edition, and contained explanatory plates of eighteen modes of putting on the cravat, and a portrait representing a dandy with black curly hair, and pink and white

complexion, like a Bond Street barber's dummy, and a neck bound up in a deep swath of spotless white muslin, highly starched. In such a garb, Romeo Coates rehearsed the Italian lover's passion.

The preface professes that the book contains demonstrations and lessons of the art of tying the neckcloth, coupled with a résumé of the latest Parisian improvements and amplifications, together with a history of the cravat from the time of Adam to the present day. The motto from Addison is chosen with exquisite tact: 'Nothing is more laudable than an inquiry after truth.' This high key-note being struck, the author goes on to assert boldly, that although foreigners are slow to give us credit for any invention that has dignified and elevated the human race, they are forced to confess that we have at least led the way in the art of *tying the cravat*. The invention is ours; the merit of perfecting it and tracing it to further uses and developments belongs to the French.

This book has, we should mention, a history of its own. It was found under a pile of unworn waistcoats in the chambers of an old ex-dandy, who had degenerated into a forlorn, eccentric, miserly old bachelor, a hermit only to be seen at sale-rooms and in print-shops. He was a man of enormous fortune; but the disappointment of some hope, the frustration of some whim, had soured his blood, and turned his heart from a jar of honey to a pot of vinegar. Old and neglected, he died, untested and unwept, surrounded by stacks of unhung pictures, litters of unread books, heaps of unused clothes, tins of preserved food, and mouldy pieces of bacon.

From such a treasure-house of good intentions, such a lazarus-house of defeated purposes, came this pert little book, the memorial of the indestructible follies of fashion.

Fashion shakes off its slough, but it never ceases to be foolish. The ruff of starched cambric, large as the wheel of a perambulator, gave way, but only to be replaced by huge bows of coloured ribbon. The broad-laced collar of the Cavaliers changed into the Puritanic-looking falling bands and bone-lace strings of Charles II.'s age. In 1660, the year of the Restoration, the huge lace-collar and the plain falling band both yielded to a new fantasy. A regiment of Croats arrived in Paris, and brought with them a new way of adorning the neck, which soon became the rage. The common soldiers wore neckcloths of common cloth, taffeta, or cotton; the officers, of lace, muslin, or silk, the ends of which were arranged in rosettes, or were ornamented with buttons or tufts, which fell gracefully on the chest. The officers wore Mechlin lace at the end of their neckcloths, which were fastened at first by strings, and at a later period by clasps or buckles. This neckcloth soon became known as the Croat or the Cravat.

But fashion cannot remain satisfied for any length of time with any article of dress that is merely useful. Grand people spend half their life trying to run away from their humble imitators, and endeavouring to dress like a distinct and superior species.

The cravat soon ceased to be that mere elegant soft fold of pierced and honeycombed lace that had enveloped the throats of the stanch men who fought at Steenkerke and the Boyne. It was thickened with stiffeners, buckramed with starch, and increased fold by fold till it grew into a bolster that made the neck as large or larger than the head.

Just before the French Revolution, the cravat had in fact become the crowning absurdity of dress. The 'Gilded Youth' after Robespierre's fall, when ladies tried to dress like Greek statues, and almost succeeded, wore cravats that covered the mouth and part of the nose. The whiskers, of enormous size, rose to the hair, which was combed down straight over the eyes. The shirt-collars rose half-way up the ear, and then the head could not be turned without the consent of the whole body.

But as crinoline, though detestable, is light and adapted for the display of dress, and as Hessian boots, though ludicrous, were good to shew off a neat leg, so cravats, even of the bolster species, had their advantages. A certain Dr Pizis, writing of the French wars in Germany, says: 'I was laughing at General Lepale on account of his enormous cravat. At the moment of entering into action, his regiment charged. There was a roar of cannon, a fiery flash of sabres, a stormy gallop of horses; and after dispersing the enemy's cavalry, some men of the regiment returning to the bivouac informed me, to my great distress, that the general had been struck by a pistol-shot in the throat. I immediately hastened to his assistance, and was shewn a bullet which had been stopped in its career by the very cravat I had just been ridiculing. Two officers and several privates had also received sabre-cuts on the cravat, and escaped without injury; so that I was obliged to confess that these immense bandages were not always useless.' To wear a bolster round one's neck is, however, paying rather a heavy insurance against such exceptional dangers.

Stocks came into use early in the eighteenth century. Choiseul, the Minister of War under Louis XV., first presented them to the French troops in place of cravats. Military pedants soon turned this article of dress into an instrument of torture. The cravat, now called a stock, became an iron ligature, excellent to produce apoplexy, vertigoes, and fainting-fits; and, judiciously used in India by martinetins, it has much encouraged *coup de soleil*.

The French colonels who cheated their men out of their food, and half starved them to increase their own profits, obliged the men to drive the blood up into their faces and heads, to give them the appearance of florid and irreproachable health. Ingenious pedantry—to case a soldier in tight inelastic dress, to bind up his limbs, to make him a machine of mere routine, when he should be lithe as a panther, as full of self-resource as an Indian trapper, as vigorous as a backwoodsman, and as nimble as Leotard. In Luttrell's elegant and gay poem, *The Advice to Julia*, the fit of the cravat is regarded as the great work of the day. Old anecdote-tellers rejoice to relate how that accomplished master of folly, Brummel, being once found knee-deep in rumpled white cravats, remarked that 'those were his failures.' The French marshals wore black-silk neck-handkerchiefs, twice round, and tied in a neat crisp bow in front. Napoleon wore such a cravat at Wagram, Lodi, and Marengo; but at Waterloo he appeared, contrary to his usual custom, in a white cravat with a flowing bow.

The cravat was the mark of a less republican and levelling age than ours; it was for exclusives who dreaded the march of intellect, reforms, and the removal of rotten boroughs. The cravat that took one hour to tie served to distinguish the man of fashion, the man of the 'Row,' of the Four-in-

hand Club, and of Boodles, the patron of the ring, the indulger in rouge-et-noir, chicken hazard, and cock-fighting, from the Pretender of Bloomsbury, who used plated forks, and hired green-grocers to wait at dinner-parties.

Many pages of this great work are devoted to preliminary instructions.

When the laundress brought home the cravats, they had to be carefully examined by the valet, to see whether they had been properly washed, ironed, and folded, and to study the exact style in which each might be worn to the best advantage. If badly got up, the cravat became faded and yellow. The quality of starch was also of infinite value, remarks the profound author, as it gave substance, elasticity, and suppleness to the muslin, and in summer possesses this incalculable advantage, that it prevents the cravat from adhering too closely and warmly to the neck. When arranged, it was necessary to pass the fingers lightly along the top, to smooth and trim it, and make it coincide with the shirt-collar.

It was requisite to have, and carry everywhere with one, a small iron, made for the purpose, to smooth the tie, and to produce a thin and equal edge. To prevent a bunch at the back of the neck, it was necessary to fold the cravat of the requisite height, and to remember to fold the one end down and the other up. 'No gentleman, with the least respect for his appearance,' says the author of this volume, 'could travel without a box, eighteen inches long, and divided into compartments'; and this box was to contain a dozen plain, a dozen spotted and striped, and a dozen coloured cravats, three dozen collars, two whalebone stiffeners, two black silk cravats, and a small flat iron.

Our talented author insists especially on the following great laws. In whatever style the cravat is put on, the knot once formed, good or bad, is irrevocable, and must on no pretence whatever be changed. As in the *sauces blanches* in cooking, so in the cravat, the smallest error is fatal to the whole. A new tie must be produced by a fresh cravat, as a new sauce must be prepared with fresh ingredients.

There were also medical rules to be observed with respect to the cravat, which was a high-pressure sort of decoration, and required to be handled with scientific prudence. It required to be loosened in cases of fainting and apoplexy, before study or business, and during a heavy dinner. Apoplectic, short-necked men were adjured to wear it loose, and to remove it during sleep.

Coloured cravats could only be used for undress. The white cravat, with spots or squares, was received as half-dress; but the plain white, as at present, was indispensable at balls or soirées. The black stock was restricted to military men when in plain clothes, and not on service.

There were eighteen methods of putting on the cravat, and it required sixteen lessons to obtain any mastery over them. The *chef-d'œuvre* of cravat ties was the Nœud Gordien. This was so intricate that it was usual with impatient dandies to remove the Nœud Gordien by cutting the cravat off their necks. This tie, the key to all the others, could only be worn once. The slightest error in its first fold vitiated its whole construction. The author explains its form, in five diagrams, which are more difficult to comprehend than the most puzzling problem of Euclid's. You passed the point *a* inside the point *z*, and so on, till the mind

became a labyrinth of confusion. It was usual with the dandies to practise first on a block.

We shall now sum up some of the names and characteristics of the more celebrated cravat-ties, for the amusement of those who are fond of old prints and caricatures, to which such fashions serve as notes and comments.

The Cravate à la Turque was shaped like a turban ; the starched ends formed a crescent under the chin. This cravat was made of the purest white muslin or cashmere. The Cravate à la Washington was sea-green, striped blue, or red and white, and the ends fell in front *en cascade*, and were pinned to the shirt. This tie, the author observes, when correctly formed, presented the appearance of a column, such was its smoothness and height. The Cravate Collier de Cheval, greatly admired by the fair sex, required no starch, and was generally striped or spotted, or of a Russian-leather colour ; the ends were fastened at the back of the neck. The Cravate Sentimentale was not to be worn by the most agreeable after the age of twenty-seven. It required a face with 'a sympathetic charm,' and a physiognomy 'that inspired sensations of love and passion.' It was especially hideous, and was fastened by a single rosette or small bow immediately under the chin.

The Cravate à la Byron was adopted by the poet from whom it derived its name, because a tight stock cramped his imagination, and suffocated his thoughts. The Byron cravat was really a sailor's tie, fastened in a large careless bow, six inches in length, and four in circumference. It only turned once round the neck, and was thought comfortable for summer or during a journey. In the Cravate à la Bergami the ends were not tied, but crossed on the breast, and tied to the braces. The Cravate de Bal was a spotless bandage of un-wrinkled muslin, with the ends pinned to the shirt. The Cravate Mathématique was black, the ends crossing each other athwart the throat with the most geometrical exactitude.

The Cravate à la Gastronne was a cravat planned by the wise and philanthropic. It was seldom worn by men under forty. It was only three fingers broad, and fastened with a very elastic knot, that slackened with the slightest movement of the neck, the faintest vacillation of the jaws, the most imperceptible swelling of the throat. It possessed this great and inestimable advantage, that it loosened itself in cases of indigestion, apoplexy, or fainting. The Cravate de Chasse was of a deep-green or dead-leaf colour, while the Cravate à la Dane was white. The Cravate à l'Anglaise was never starched, the Cravate à l'Indépendance was always striped with red, blue, and white.

The Cravate Porte-manteau was a huge structure of a Russian-leather colour, the ends hidden by the knot, which was shaped like a travelling porte-manteau. The Cravate en Tresse was another eccentricity, for the triple knot was fashioned to resemble a shell on a twisted French roll. In the Cravate à la Paresseuse, the ends were unfolded and crossed over the chest—a plan which served to conceal the shirt, and display the neck-handkerchief. Old beau and married men favoured this sort of cravat. The Cravate à la Fidélité was worn by the French National Guard when in uniform. The Cravate à la Talma was consecrated to mourning only. In the Cravate à la Romaine, the ends were passed through a ring, and then fastened behind the neck in a small knot. The Cravate à la d'Arlincourt

received 'its first impulse,' as our author graphically states, from the back of the neck.

This book must have been invaluable to the dandies. 'Persons,' as the phrase went, 'who were ambitious of mixing in polite society' could not surely have done without it. The French ranked the art of tying the cravat as essential to the true dandy as the art of giving a good dinner was to an ambassador. A well-arranged cravat was considered in itself a letter of introduction, and when coupled with a handsome face, it was irresistible.

In his final chapter, 'On the Importance of the Cravat in Society,' our author rises almost into inspiration. He says that when a man of rank makes his *entrée* into a circle of taste and elegance, he will see, after the usual compliments, that his coat attracts small attention compared to the critical and scrutinising examination that will be made 'on the set of his cravat.' If this be not correctly and elegantly put on, though his coat be of the reigning fashion, and Stultze's most exquisite performance, all eyes will be coldly turned on the folds of the fatal cravat ; his reception will be icy ; his name goes down for ever branded as that of a bad dresser ; he will be considered an ignorant pretender ; he will be compelled to suffer the impertinence of every contemptuous fop ; he will have to bear in silence the perpetual jeering whisper : 'He cannot even put on a cravat properly.'

But, on the other hand, the fortunate wearer of a scientific cravat, a cravat *savamment* and elegantly formed, even although his coat may not be of the last cut, will meet with a very different reception. Every one will rise and receive him with marks of distinguished respect. They will cheerfully resign their seats to him ; their delighted eyes will be fixed upon his well-covered throat ; even though he talks downright nonsense, he will be applauded to the skies, and the remark will be certain to be made by the best qualified person present : 'That man has critically studied the thirty-two lessons on the art of tying the cravat.'

The author concludes his volume with a hint for persons entering polite society for the first time, and it is worthy their treasuring up : 'The greatest insult that can be offered to a man *comme il faut* is to seize him by the cravat. In this case, blood only can wash out the stain upon the honour of either party.'

Without puffing ourselves about the advanced civilisation of our age, we can at least, even from such a small landmark as this book, see that in some things we have at least grown wiser than our ancestors. Fashion is still frivolous, fickle, and irrational ; but its aberrations are certainly fewer and less absurd ; while we have ceased to try and make mere dress a mark of exclusiveness and social distinction.

#### THE SOONDERBUNS OF BENGAL.

THE river Ganges, on debouching into the plains of Hindustan, pursues an easterly course, and after flowing parallel with the Himalayan chain for hundreds of miles, turns to the south. On approaching the sea, its waters distribute themselves into numerous channels of varying depth and width, which form what is known as the Delta of the Ganges. Each of these rivers has innumerable outlets, which flow into one another, and

connect the main channels together by a most elaborate net-work of streams. The tract of country thus intersected was for many years covered with densest jungle, and the undisputed domain of the tiger and wild boar. Much of it, too, was marsh, created by the frequent encroachments of the sea. It is known as the Soonderbuns, often incorrectly spelled *Soonderbunds*. The name is compounded of *soondri*, a particular kind of wood, and *bun*, a forest, and means the soondri-wood forests. Those whose business it is to supply the markets of Calcutta and its vicinity with firewood, get portions of these forests felled out to them by the government, and employ men to cut down the trees. The wood thus obtained is chopped into slips a foot long and two inches in diameter, which are made up into bundles, and sold for fuel. Hundreds of open boats, large and small, are to be seen in the shady creeks and rivers of the Soonderbuns, conveying their cargoes to Calcutta; and as Bengalis never use anything but wood for cooking, the trade has always been a most profitable one. The wood-cutters are, of course, exposed to considerable peril from wild beasts, and not a year passes without fatal encounters with tigers, or panthers, or wild boars; but the risks are counterbalanced by the profits, and the men who undertake to cut the wood, are content to make the best provision circumstances will allow against the attacks of their four-footed enemies.

It is commonly believed that the Soonderbuns never were anything but a tangled mass of forest, given over to wild beasts; but this is a mistake. Before the Mohammedan conquest of Bengal, when Arracan, now a British possession, was an independent kingdom, its rajahs, taking advantage of the effeminacy of their Hindu neighbours, made frequent incursions into Eastern Bengal, the Muga, or Arracanese, colonising large tracts of country along the sea-board. Sundry ruins, which still exist in the depths of the forests, shew that the Soonderbuns must once have been extensively populated by them. When they retired to their native province, the lands they had cleared returned to jungle, and this jungle remained undisturbed from that time to about twenty or thirty years ago, when Bengali villages began to spring up on its outskirts and along the banks of some of the larger and more frequented rivers.

But though the lands of the Soonderbuns have lain unproductive, its rivers have been of no small advantage to the trade of Eastern Bengal. For many years now, by far the largest portion of the traffic between the districts of Backergunj, Furedepore, Mymensing, Dacca, Sylhet, Tipperah, and even Chittagong and Calcutta, has flowed through the Soonderbuns, whose channels are navigable for the largest boats all the year round, and are safer than the treacherous Ganges. The Soonderbuns route is also the shortest of the river-routes, no mean consideration in a country whose highways are not roads, but rivers. Let the reader open a map of Bengal, and he will see what I mean. A merchant wishing to send a cargo of jute or safflower from Naraingunj, one of the two chief marts of Eastern Bengal, and eight miles south-west of Dacca, has two courses open to him:

he may either send his boats up the Ganges by Furedepore and Pubnah, and then down by the Mattabanga and Hooghly to Calcutta; or south to Burrisal, and so through the Soonderbuns. But he invariably prefers the latter course, and that for obvious reasons. The passage up the Ganges is the longer one, as well in respect of the distance to be traversed, as of the unavoidably slow rate of progress. There is a season of the year when the most powerful steamers are staggered by the terrific current of this Leviathan river: the reader may conceive what the difficulties are in the case of crazy native boats, seemingly built with a view to secure the smallest amount of progress in the largest amount of time. They are towed up against the current by men who can just crawl along the steep bank, pulling the boats after them by means of strings fastened to the mast-head. Any extra strain on the *goon*, as these strings are called, breaks it at once, and the boat thus suddenly set adrift is whirled round in a moment, and borne back by the current for miles, before the boatmen, who have been left on shore, can recover it. Thus the accident of a moment undoes the toiling effort of one or two days. The Soonderbuns route, on the other hand, has less risk, and the passage is accomplished in half the time. The rivers are all tidal, and if, owing to the jungle which grows to the water's-edge concealing the very bank, there are no facilities for tracking, this mode of progressing is not necessary. The boats are rowed all through the Soonderbuns, and keep moving on by night as well as by day, as long as the tides serve them. During the intervals of ebb or flood, as the case may be, the anchor is dropped, and the boatmen eat or sleep.

Although the navigation of these rivers has always been free from risks, there used in former days to be not a little danger from wild beasts. Old boatmen with whom I have conversed, as on moonlit nights we have followed the endless windings of the creeks and broader streams, with no sound to break the slumber of the forest save the measured dip of our oars and the dismal howl of the *fayo*,\* remember well the time when to row too close to the banks was to tempt some tiger prowling in the neighbourhood to spring on the boat, and make a meal of one or two of the men. Since then, however, much of the jungle has been cleared; the land in the northern half of the Soonderbuns is now dotted with villages, and the wild beasts have been driven southwards, to the Great Soonderbuns. Here they are for the most part undisturbed, and continue to be very bold. I was moving up one of the rivers in these parts on one occasion, when at midday I was startled by a chorus of the most unearthly yells, sent forth by my boatmen. I hurried on deck to ascertain what was the matter, when I saw an unusually large-sized tiger ten yards in front of my boat, swimming across the river. The beast turned to look at us, but did not seem in the least disconcerted at the sight of the boat or the shouts of the men. He pursued his course with the utmost deliberation until he reached the opposite bank, when he disappeared in the woods.

Travelling through the Soonderbuns used, till very recently, to be dangerous also by reason of the dacoits or river-pirates that swarmed in these

\* An animal resembling a jackal, so called from its peculiar cry, *fayo*, *fayo*, and believed by the natives always to precede the tiger.

parts. This danger especially threatened boats laden with merchandise. The people inhabiting the villages scattered among the jungles spent their days in cultivating their fields or attending market, and their nights in plundering passing boats. Wending their way in their long, narrow canoes, as night set in they stationed themselves close under the banks, where they were effectually concealed by the deep shadows of the trees that overhung the water. Some unfortunate boat coming up late at night anchored in mid-stream, perhaps, waiting for the next tide. This was their opportunity. Cautiously emerging from its hiding-place under the trees, first one canoe, manned by a dozen men or more, all armed with knives, but each deftly and noiselessly plying his paddle, made its way to the boat. The men on board, tired after the day's work, were probably by this time all fast asleep, the very watchman snoring over his hookah. On ascertaining this to be the case, the other canoes came out of the shadows fringing the shore, and reaching the boat, were noiselessly fastened to it. The robbers then mounted to the deck, and with their knives, called *daos*, cut the matting, and so effected an entrance into the hold. If, while busy transferring the cargo to their canoes, they were interrupted by the boatmen awaking from sleep, they curtly recommended them to keep quiet, lest a worse fate than the mere loss of cargo should overtake them. The threat seldom failed of the desired effect, and the robbers completed their work unmolested.

Sometimes the dacoits were impatient to secure their prey before the boatmen had had time to fall asleep. At such times the way was to sidle up to the boat on some pretext that would avert suspicion. If their approach was noticed, and they were asked what they wanted, the usual reply was: '*O bhai, ayoon aiché?*' ('O brother,' can you give us some fire?')—the men pretending to be in want of fire to light their hookahs with. If the boatman thus accosted was so simple as to let the canoe come near enough for the fire to be handed over, the boat was immediately boarded, and the usual dacoity ensued.

The daring and expertness of these dacoits have become a proverb in Bengal. Even Europeans threading the mazes of the Soonderbuns were not exempted from their friendly attentions; but as they seldom go about without firearms, they were not often molested. It used to be a common thing, and is still, for native boats falling in with a European's bhowliah, to keep close to it all through 'the land of the dacoits,' for the sake of the security thus gained. In the 'good old times' before steamers invaded the holy Ganges, and railway trains flew puffing and screeching along its banks, people travelled to and from the North-western Provinces of India in heavy, lumbering budgerows, which took three months, and sometimes more, to accomplish the journey. Those were golden days for river-pirates, who, among other expedients for securing their prey, frequently scuttled the boats marked for plunder. The way in which they did it was certainly ingenious. In the cool of the evening, your budgerow being safely moored by means of ropes fastened to stout stakes driven into the bank, and you being seated on the roof of the boat dreamily gazing on the expanse of river before

you, broken as it is, here and there, by the long, low sand-banks which the waters have thrown up in their impetuous flow—you happen, in a listless sort of way, to observe an earthen pitcher floating bottom upwards, and slowly approaching your boat. You forget, a moment after, that you have seen it; floating ghurrahs (as these pitchers are called) in a river into which hundreds of empty ghurrahs are daily thrown in company with the bodies of their dead owners, are a by no means uncommon sight. Soon after, however, and as the darkness begins to come on, you make the disagreeable discovery that your boat is filling with water. It sinks, and makes a cozy bed for itself in the soft mud, before you can do any thing to save it. You wade to shore, and make the best of your way to the nearest thannah (police station) for assistance. The thannah is miles away inland; and by the time you get back, you find that the people of a neighbouring village have helped themselves to your property, and escaped. It does not occur to you to connect the sinking of the budgerow with the harmless ghurrah that came floating down the stream in its purposeless course, and bumped accidentally against the side of your boat; and yet the two things stand very much in the relation of cause and effect. That ghurrah was not an empty one, nor was it accident that brought it in contact with the boat. In it was a human head, to which was attached a living body; and this body, which you did not see because it was under water, directed the course of the ghurrah. The villain who thus got to the side of your boat unsuspected, bored a hole or two into it before the ghurrah floated off again. He was in league with a band of dacoits who watched and waited for the dénouement from a distance, and then came down like vultures upon their prey.

I am not aware that the dacoits of the Soonderbuns have ever practised the ghurrah stratagem, but they have done things quite as clever. I have known them, for example, to take away not only the blanket under which one has been sleeping, but the very sheet on which he has been lying asleep, and that without awaking him. A gentleman was once travelling through the Soonderbuns in 'a native boat,' that is to say, a boat surmounted by a mat-constructed cabin. It was December, and as the cold north wind came oozing in through the matting, he drew his blanket over him on getting into bed. He awoke earlier than usual the next morning, feeling very cold, and wondering at the large amount of morning light that pervaded his cabin. To his dismay, he found not only that he was blanketless, but that a hole two feet square had been cut in the matting. While pondering these things, he made the further discovery, that the sheet on which he had lain was no longer on the bed. The inference was clear that he had had a nocturnal visitor. He had heard stories of sheet-lifting before; but not till now, that he had himself been successfully practised upon, did he believe that the feat could be accomplished. The scoundrel who covets the sheet under you, approaches your bedside armed with a feather, with which he gently tickles your ear. Accustomed as you are to the buzz of mosquitoes, which, by the way, have a notable penchant for singing in one's ears, you only fidget a little in your sleep, and turning on your side, press the ear that has been operated on, on the pillow. Immediately, the one half of the sheet thus released is rolled up lengthwise close under your back. The feather is then again cautiously applied

\* Natives call one another 'brother' when they want to be friendly, or secure a favour.

to the exposed ear ; you turn once more, and the other half of the sheet is released. One more tickle, adroitly administered, disengages the sheet altogether, and the rascal no doubt inwardly chuckles as he leaves you to your slumber.

But it is only the men who do business on their own account, and who go out alone, that care to observe caution in their proceedings. Every villager in these watery districts owns a canoe or dinghy for going to market in, so that he needs no further stock-in-trade when he takes to the thieving line. His dinghy, generally about seven feet long, is propelled by a single pole, feathered at both ends. Standing upright in his boat, and grasping the pole in the middle with both hands, he manages, by an easy action of the wrists, to dip the ends alternately into the water on either side, and so to shoot along with wonderful rapidity. Being alone, he is timid, and will try to escape the moment he is likely to be discovered. But professional dacoits go about in large parties, and, till recently, were very bold. Their canoes are from thirty to forty feet long, and are propelled, with marvellous swiftness, by a double line of paddles, which are preferred to regular oars because they do not rest on the side of the boat, and may be worked noiselessly. The paddle is worked with both hands. Held out over the side, and dipped perpendicularly into the water with the blade at right angles to the boat, it pushes back the water very effectively, and a canoe rowed by twenty-five or thirty men, each with a paddle, secures to it a speed which makes capture hopeless.

About six years ago, the dacoit nuisance became so formidable, that it was beginning seriously to affect the trade of the eastern districts. Accordingly the government finding the ordinary police unable to suppress it, organised a special department of service, with a view to cope with the evil. A Dacoity Commissioner was appointed, the choice falling on an officer who had once himself been vigorously pursued by dacoits in these same Soonderbuns, and a couple of gun-boats were placed at his service. These little steamers being narrow and of light draught, did the work assigned them very effectually. Canoes were captured, scores of dacoits were brought to justice, more than one confederacy was completely broken up, and dacoity in the Soonderbuns became too hazardous a profession to pay. The rivers of this region have thus been rendered tolerably safe again, the dacoits having either settled down to agricultural pursuits or migrated elsewhere.

Large tracts of Soonderbun land have, within the last six or seven years, been cleared and brought under cultivation. Formerly, the traveller, wending his way through the maze of streams, saw nothing for days together but the densest jungle, growing down to the water's-edge, with its shadows, cast from both banks, often meeting in mid-stream. The scenery was here and there varied by fens and marshes, where the tall rank feather-grass bent to the breeze, or bowed under the weight of the long-legged herons that here seek their prey. Now, however, the entire aspect of things has changed. The government of India has published an Act for the grant of Waste Lands, under whose provisions capitalists, both European and native, have begun the cultivation of thousands of acres but recently covered with jungle. Lands, too, long subject to the periodical inundations of the sea, and hitherto of no use except in the manufacture of salt, have

been dyked, and rendered culturable. Villages are springing up in all directions, and the population daily increasing ; and as the notorious unhealthiness of the delta disappears with the clearances that are made, and the lands that are redeemed from marsh and swamp, the Soonderbuns will become one of the most productive regions of Bengal. They have so long had a bad name for miasmatic fevers, that it requires very judicious management on the part of the landholders to induce ryots to settle there ; but they are succeeding in doing this. Gifts of plough-oxen, low rents, and sundry other advantages, are offered, and they have the effect of attracting a population which grows every day. The capitalists who have obtained grants under the terms of the Waste Lands law, are required to bring their lands under cultivation within a specified time, failing which, those lands are liable to be resumed by the government. Whatever may be the justice of the principle, the government will do well to abstain, as far as possible, from such assumptions, considering the peculiar difficulties that capitalists have to contend with. Ryots are timid about settling on untried lands, and labour, owing to the great demand for it elsewhere, is scarce.

#### CHRISTMAS IN THE WORKHOUSE.

The prickly holly, spotted with red,

Bristled at every pane ;

There were wagons shaking with holly

Brushing down many a lane ;

Laughing children raced and ran,

Red as the winter berry ;

I listened outside the workhouse gate,

And even 'the paupers' were merry.

Pleasant to see the frosted flowers

On every window pane ;

Pleasant to hear the red-faced lads

Run shouting down the lane ;

But the sound that cheered me Christmas through,

Over my dry old sherry,

Was hearing there, at the workhouse gate,

That even 'the paupers' were merry.

Christmas was gay in the old squire's hall,

Gay at the village inn,

Cheery and loud by the farmer's fire,

Happy the manse within ;

But the surest signs of the general joy,

And that all the world was happy—very,

Were the sounds that proved at the workhouse door

That even 'the paupers' were merry.

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